

Questions and Answers about Dairy Nutrient Management Plans

December 2, 1998

When people talk about dairy nutrients, what do they mean?

The term “dairy nutrients” can refer to the major plant nutrients contained in dairy wastes, or can mean the solid and liquid components of dairy wastes. In this information sheet, dairy nutrients means the solid and liquid components of dairy wastes.

What is the goal of a dairy nutrient management plan?

The fundamental goal of a dairy nutrient management plan is to protect the quality of Washington’s water resources.

Does a dairy producer benefit from having a plan?

Yes. First, an approved and certified plan will satisfy the planning requirements of RCW 90.64. Second, dairy producers may reap financial benefits by using the nutrients in dairy wastes to enhance the productivity of crops grown on the farm. Properly utilized, dairy wastes can safely supplement or replace other fertilizers. This can reduce costs and improve soil quality.

How will plans prevent water pollution?

Dairy nutrient management plans are based on the agronomic utilization of nutrients to prevent nutrients and other pollutants from entering surface and ground waters. In less technical terms, plans are designed so growing plants can use the nutrients in dairy wastes before the nutrients run off fields or leach into ground water.

Are all dairy nutrient management plans developed from this basis?

No. While most dairy producers recognize that dairy wastes contain components that can enhance the productivity of crops they produce, other producers may not have sufficient or appropriate lands to safely utilize the wastes, or may choose to sell or otherwise dispose of the wastes off the farm.

If dairy wastes are shipped off the farm, is a dairy nutrient management plan still required?

Yes. When dairy wastes go off the farm, the dairy nutrient management plan must identify who is receiving the wastes and what will be done with the wastes. A manure management agreement between the provider of the wastes and the receiver is necessary.

If dairy wastes are shipped off the farm does the entity receiving the waste need a nutrient management plan?

If the receiving entity is a dairy with a “Class A” milk license, yes. In almost all cases, dairy wastes will be applied to land at some point. These enterprises should have a nutrient management plan.

Is a dairy nutrient management plan the same as a conservation plan?

No. A dairy nutrient management plan only addresses the nutrient management aspects of the operation. A farm plan (also called a conservation plan) addresses all natural resource issues relating to the operation.

If a dairy producer has a farm plan, does he or she need a dairy nutrient management plan?

Yes. But the dairy nutrient management plan can be a part of the whole farm plan. Whether it is part of a whole farm plan, or a separate plan, it must meet the minimum standards test adopted by the Conservation Commission.

Must a dairy producer get a dairy nutrient management plan from a conservation district?

No. Others may develop dairy nutrient management plans. Although most dairy producers will probably utilize the services of their local conservation district, consultants and some dairy producers are also likely to develop dairy nutrient management plans.

Who approves dairy nutrient management plans?

The five-member board of supervisors in each conservation district approves plans.

By what date must a plan be approved?

July 1, 2002.

If a plan is not developed by a conservation district, does the conservation district still need to approve it?

Yes. All dairy nutrient management plans must go through the approval process administered by local conservation districts.

What is the approval process?

A checklist has been developed to assist conservation districts and dairy producers in going through the approval process. It consists of a series of questions about the development and content of the plan.

What if a conservation district refuses to approve a plan and the dairy producer believes the plan should be approved?

The conservation district must identify the elements that are insufficient in the plan, and communicate these deficiencies in writing to the dairy producer within 90 days of receipt of the plan. The dairy producer may appeal the conservation district's decision in one of two ways: an informal appeal to the Conservation Commission, or a formal appeal to the Pollution Control Hearings Board.

Once a local conservation district approves a plan, does the producer need to continue working with the district?

Yes. After plan approval, the dairy producer implements the plan. Once all the practices in the plan have been implemented, the conservation district and the producer certify the plan has been implemented and management guidelines in the plan are being followed.

By what date must a plan be certified?

December 31, 2003.